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E-Commerce - A Collection Development Perspective - Part 1 - Identification and Selection

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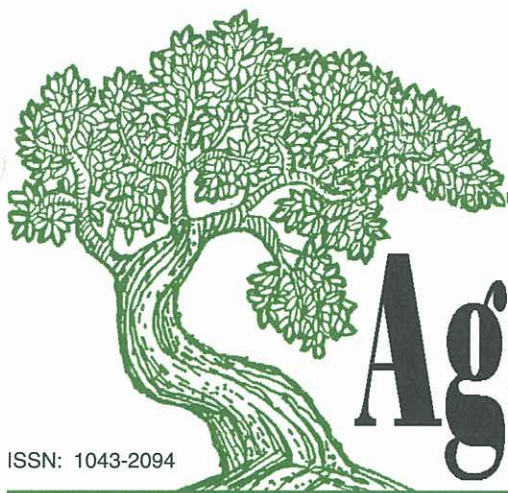
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Against the Grain

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Against the Grain

"Linking Publishers, Vendors and Librarians"

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E-commerce — A Collection Development Perspective — Part 1 — Identification and Selection

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Collection development and e-commerce individually cover a multitude of sins. Collection development or management today consists of providing users or clients with access to a significant piece of the world of knowledge. Gone is the goal of the right book for the right reader at the right time. Today's ideal could be borrowed from the **U.S. Army Special Forces**, "Anything, any time, any place, any how." E-commerce is an equally expansive term. *Wired* magazine's *Encyclopedia of the New Economy* (<http://www.hotwired.com/special/ene/index.html>) defines it as "doing business on the network." Such breadth makes e-commerce indistinguishable from commerce, as supermarkets and clothing franchises tightly network the

product on the shelves, purchases, deliveries, and warehousing. E-commerce can deal with the use of a network (especially the Internet) in the identification and selection of the information to be acquired, possibly the delivery of resources, and the payment for the materials. This treatment focuses on the former, part 2 will focus on the latter (someone else will be left to deal with Mr. In-between), and part 3 offers a future wish list.

Identification and Selection

Firm Orders

For the public as well as libraries, **Amazon.com** has been the leader in providing



online firm order service. Coupled with expedited delivery (using the U.S. Mail), even remote corners of the nation (such as Appalachian Ohio) have access to a bookstore the likes of which would have been available earlier only in the

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If Rumors Were Horses

YBP has signed a letter of intent to acquire **Lindsay & Howes**, the distinguished UK bookseller to US academic and research libraries, according to **Glen Secor**, President, YBP. **Miriam Lindsay** and **Bernard Howes**, along with their fine staff will join the YBP team. The status quo will be maintained through 1998 (YBP will continue to operate their UK branch in Southampton and Lindsay & Howes will continue to operate from their offices in Godalming.) However, during the first half of 1999, YBP's Southampton operation will be merged into Lindsay & Howes, thereafter conducting all

YBP UK business out of Godalming and under the name **Lindsay & Howes**. So, the fantastic duo of Miriam and Bernard will have responsibility for all YBP operations in the UK! Godalming is not terribly far from Southampton and

Glen says that they have asked all current YBP personnel in Southampton to transfer to Godalming when the time comes. You might want to re-read **Pam Censer's** excellent interview with Miriam and Bernard in *ATG*, v.9#6, pp.30-31 (Dec.1997/Jan 1998).

Vernon W. Cain, Chief Executive Officer & Man-
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larger cities. Barnes & Noble, Borders and others are following onto the Web, endangering local bookstores even further.

Amazon.com exemplifies new understandings of time.

A major approval plan vendor on the West Coast justifiably brags of the speed of its service in delivering materials (citing the ongoing monitoring by Peter Stevens of the University of Washington as documenting its leadership [<http://weber.u.washington.edu/~acqdiv/vendorspeedjuly1998.html>]). Such leadership, however, consisted of delivery in about 24-33 days in 1997-98 (20 days for rush). An East Coast firm order dealer boasts of its speed of delivery, citing 29 days from order to receipt. With Amazon.com, I generally can expect delivery in five to seven days. With mass-market titles, from Amazon.com, I, as an individual, as well as an institution can receive a 30-35% discount (although this is largely offset by shipping for individual orders [for standard orders—priority mail—\$3.00 plus \$0.95 per book]). While Amazon's slogan, "3 million titles, everyday savings of up to 40%" may be overstated, it has offered a breakthrough in pricing and availability to individuals and institutions across the nation.

In the June *ATG* (p. 80), Bob Nardini of Yankee Book Peddler (YBP) and Matt Nauman of Blackwell North America discussed the difficulties in providing warehouse inventory information in their online databases. This responded to the question that they were asked; however, it missed the Amazon lesson. As would-be purchasers of materials, we are not concerned with whether it is in a specific warehouse or not but with when we can expect to receive it. As libraries, we gain nothing from monitoring warehouse stock (what a vendor may have "just in case" it is needed, or, more likely, from approval returns) but we should be able to expect information on how quickly they can provide a title ("just in time" to meet our users' needs).

One example may illustrate how Amazon and competitors are changing book-buying for individuals and institutions.

A colleague at an Ivy League institution contacted a specialized mailing list on Asia seeking information on Asian book dealers who might be able to provide expedited shipping of a book that a professor wished to use for as a course textbook. The book was published by an Asian branch of Oxford University Press (OUP). When the inquirer had tried to get the book from OUP in New York, he was informed that it would take six

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months. While a respected bookstore in Singapore (**Select Books**) was suggested, we were all embarrassed when one respondent indicated that Amazon.com reported three-day availability on the title.

Beyond its speed, numbers, and pricing, Amazon has borrowed and improved library current awareness service. Based on previous purchases, a customer returning to the Amazon site is advised of a list of titles likely to be of interest (correlating previous purchases against what other buyers of those titles have bought) and given an opportunity to refine the profile. Additionally, one can sign up by subject area for periodic email alerts of titles of possible interest or new publications by preferred authors. Although still in development, YBP's "GobiGen" product will provide (whether by push or pull is yet to be determined) similar information (without the artificial intelligence tracking of purchases used by Amazon) based on approval plan profiles that can be shared with faculty (either to seek their input or simply as a current awareness service).

A further refinement, bringing traditional jobbers into e-commerce, is the delivery of books to users on demand as represented by RoweCom's kStore and YBP's Libroline. Both appear targeted at special libraries as a way to facilitate end-user purchasing while

providing institutional tracking and accounting. Just as with Amazon, such services require a substantial database, an easy customer interface, and a willingness to let the end-user make collection development decisions to succeed.

Of course, functionally, such an approach is little different from unmediated document delivery as offered by CARL Uncover and others. Indeed, the recently announced experiment, **PEAK (Pricing Electronic Access to Knowledge)** launched by the University of Michigan and nine other universities with Elsevier places the entire transaction (from identification of a desired article to immediate online access) on the network (albeit through pre-purchase of tokens for the best rates).

Approval Plans

In its RFP for a Statewide Approval Plan to serve most academic libraries in Ohio (on a voluntary basis), **OhioLINK** identified online information and selection as important as the physical delivery of prospective books to be acquired (the usual core definition of an approval plan). In developing a shortlist of vendors to be considered, ability to provide online identification, selection, and

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Much of the demand for Web-based publications is driven by the need for access from the desktop. However, the potential of the medium is so much greater. E-journals are likely to go through a phase of deconstruction, whereby those features that are time sensitive, such as classified ads, news and rumors, will be distributed more frequently. Longer articles, which are not likely to be read online, can be distributed in print and the online version will link to subsequent correspondence. Letters to the editor will shift to letters to the author with an opportunity to create an online dialog through a moderated listserv.

Indexes and the journals they link to can serve as the focal point of services such as the one offered by **EI Village** to engineers. **Elsevier's** recent acquisition of **EI Village** and **Kluwer's** acquisition of **Ovid** point to the value of positioning respected indexes as the front end to a collection of journal titles. This speaks to the need for a user-oriented approach focused on a variety of services designed for a professional group.

Community-based Websites will include job listings, access to the fulltext literature through established indexes, discussion groups, meeting announcements, a referral

service, training opportunities, and other ideas still to be introduced. Members and their institutions may pay a flat fee to access key features of the site and transactional fees to cover document delivery or additional value-added products.

Economic Model

According to **Evan Schwartz**, author of "Webonomics" and a writer for *Wired* magazine, there are new economic models emerging on the Web where providers seek to inspire loyalty with incentive programs like those offered by the airlines. This approach offers more promise than either the digicash or micropayments which have yet to be seen in widespread usage as anticipated.

In addition to the traditional advertising and subscription-based approach, creative alternatives are being tested. One of the initial hybrid models under development in scholarly publishing is the **Peak Project** (www.lib.umich.edu/libhome/peak/), between **Elsevier** and a dozen research librar-

ies. Libraries pay a greatly discounted rate for large blocks of articles which can be selected from any of the 1100 online journals. Additional articles needed beyond the initial block purchased are acquired at a higher individual document delivery rate. This has been compared to assembling one's own collection of hand-picked articles which are then made available to the institutional community.

Document delivery has been an increasingly popular option for many years and will likely become more so in the electronic environment. The traditional indexes which identify articles in response to a user's query will be seen as tools to drive demand for document delivery. As publishers make their journals available through various distribution channels, the user is more likely to discover an article for which they don't have a paid subscription. This will support the migration to a more demand-driven model for journal articles.

Different subscription models will emerge offering current issues only with an option for a slightly higher fee for accessing backfiles online. Even if the user had print issues, it

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"Elsevier's recent acquisition of EI Village and Kluwer's acquisition of Ovid point to the value of positioning respected indexes as the front end to a collection of journal titles."

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(to some degree) reporting served to separate those companies making the shortlist from other respondents. All three finalists, **Academic Book Center**, **Blackwell's Book Service**, and **YBP** offered sophisticated online information and selection systems. Other factors such as references and pricing also were crucial; however, the quality of existing online systems to aid selectors, expedite acquisitions, and a commitment to cooperation (or partnership) in developing additional online capabilities to support information sharing and coordination among participating academic libraries throughout Ohio were pivotal in the final selection.

Beyond bibliographic and local history information, an approval-plan vendor's online database can provide a vehicle for cooperating institutions to share information and to incorporate it into the selection process. While **OhioLINK's** central database provides information on the extent of duplication among collections (70% of the titles are held by only one or two libraries and 14% by more than five), such information is after-the-fact. If one wishes to redirect purchasing from unnecessary redundancy to assuring access to as much of the world knowledge base as possible, such information is needed before expenditures are made, and a major book dealer's online catalog can be an effective venue (or so we believe).


Complementing identification and selection, most approval vendors and other firm order services are providing a variety of on- and off-line services to expedite the material to a user. Invoices can be sent to online systems, and vendors can provide information to **OCLC's PromptCat** or provide their own **MARC** records—over the Net or on other media.

Out-of-Print, Rare, and Antiquarian (OP)

While e-commerce is permeating all areas of collection development, nowhere has it been more transformative than in the out-of-print market. In the bad old days, we would prepare lists to be sent to a few, trusted OP dealers. If they were unsuccessful, we would, usually fruitlessly, advertise the titles in **AB Bookman's Weekly**. With the advent of **Interloc** (<http://www.interloc.com>) and **BiblioFind** (<http://www.bibliofind.com>), the options to identify possibly available copies of OP titles greatly expanded. Today, **MX Bookfinder** (<http://www.mxbf.com>) compounds this power. One can search **Advanced Book Exchange**, **AntiQBook**, **Bibliocity**, **Interloc**, and **Powell's Books** (with searchable listings from hundreds of dealers) with a single query. Instead of a quote on a single copy, one may identify a dozen or more copies listed by participating book dealers, often with considerable range in price. Reports by **N. Kraft** and **D. Marshall** in *Acnet* (Vol. 8, No. 29, Sept. 20, 1998) add additional sources

for European titles. Before, it was usually, do you want the copy or not? Now, price, edition, and condition become added selection elements.

As with much computer-derived information, identifying a dealer with the copy desired is not the same as purchasing the book. Libraries long have debated over whether OPACs should optimistically inform users that a specific title is "available" or realistically advise them to "check the shelves." Our experience is that one-third or more of the copies identified through these dealer networks will have been previously sold (in a worldwide market, there is more incentive to list titles than to delete them). Still of a dozen copies reported available, losing one-third leaves seven more copies than would have been previously identified.

With the ability to view the wares of hundreds of dealers, institutions and dealers are moving beyond traditional bounds of trust. An institution wishing to purchase materials identified through **MX Bookfinder** or another dealer network will have no experience as to the reliability or honesty of a listing dealer. Conversely, the dealer may never have heard of many small potential institutional customers and will have no experience with how long payment may take for materials supplied against a purchase order. A solution for both sides can be found in electronic and/or plastic money, the subject of the second part of this perspective. 

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